

Raising standards, improving lives: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Strategic Plan 2011–2015

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The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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Introduction

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills was created in April 2007 as the single body responsible for the inspection, and in some cases regulation, of schools, colleges, teacher training, childcare, children's social care, work-based learning, Cafcass, adult education and more. Much has been achieved in that time. Bringing together these areas of work into a single organisation was a significant undertaking and it has resulted not only in better inspection and regulation but also real savings to the public purse, with expenditure on inspection and regulation reducing by around a third.

Over the last few years, we have reviewed each area of our work, listening to what parents and employers, children and learners told us to make sure we were focusing on what mattered to them. At the same time we have been re-focusing inspection on the fundamentals: the close observation of the engagement between front-line professionals and the children, young people and learners with whom they work. Any recent school inspection report, for example, will tell you much more about what goes on in the classroom than has been the case in the last few years. We have also changed inspection frameworks to reflect the higher expectations society has of public services. But the core purpose of inspection has remained the same: Ofsted seeks to report candidly on the quality of services so that informed choices about them can be made, both by those who use them and those who fund them. Inspection should also enable the services to improve, thereby enhancing the life chances of children, young people and adult learners.

We have seen important improvements in the sectors we inspect and regulate but our evidence tells us that children and learners are still not served as well as they might be. While standards are rising, for example, they are not doing so to the same extent for different groups of children. Too many services are no better than satisfactory and often it is disadvantaged children that do not have access to the best education and care. Outcomes for looked after children are still not good enough, and while improving, too many local authority child protection services are not as effective as they need to be; action for these children needs to be intensified.

We know that inspection and regulation need to continue to develop to help address these issues. But we know that at the same time increasing pressure on public spending means our budget will continue to reduce significantly. Together this means we will have to look hard at all areas of our work over the coming years to ensure we use the resources available in the most effective way. In schools and colleges, this will mean focusing sharply on key areas, particularly teaching and learning, and no longer routinely inspecting the very best unless concerns emerge about their performance. In children's social care and childcare, it will mean working with the government as it responds to recent reviews of these sectors, to ensure we focus inspection and regulation on what really matters to ensuring children and potentially vulnerable adults are safe and can thrive. And in learning and skills, it will mean looking at each area we inspect to ensure that it continues to be a cost-effective way of driving improvement.

As will be seen from this plan, that means we are reviewing every area of our work over the next few years. We will do this in consultation with those providing services, those using them, and the wider public. We will have some tough decisions to make and this strategic plan sets out our priorities. It also sets out how we will track our progress, including against outcomes for children and learners. Over the next few months we will seek people's views on the plan before publishing a revised version in the autumn. Only by listening and responding to what people tell us will we be able to ensure that we deliver against our commitment: *Raising standards and improving lives*.

Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
Baroness Sally Morgan, Chairman, Ofsted Board

What we are for

Ofsted inspects and regulates to achieve excellence in education and skills for learners of all ages, and in the care of children and young people, thereby raising standards and improving lives.

Raising standards

Ofsted works in ways which have the most impact on raising standards for children and learners of all ages. Those providing services consider their own performance against our published inspection frameworks, and Ofsted inspectors report without fear or favour on how well they are doing and how they can improve. Ofsted will focus more on inspecting the weakest services, which are too often those used by the poorest and most vulnerable. We will share the good practice we find so others can learn from it.

Improving lives

Inspectors have unique access to education, care, training and children's services. They report what they find in ways that give children and learners a stronger voice, while enabling people to make informed choices. Inspectors will spend more time directly observing practice for children and learners, taking account of their views and those of parents and employers. Ofsted regulates social care and childcare services to help ensure children are safe and well looked after. Ofsted reports will be clear, helpful and accessible. We help to hold services to account, and ensure those providing services are clear about where improvements are necessary.

Our values

Our values guide everything we do. They apply to everyone in Ofsted and all those who work on our behalf.

Putting children and learners first

We act in the interests of individual children, young people and learners of all ages, whatever their background.

Achieving excellence

We focus on how standards can be raised and outcomes improved. We always try to 'do good as we go' and have high expectations of ourselves, and of those who provide the services we inspect and regulate.

Behaving with integrity

We work without fear or favour and report on the basis of evidence. We listen and respond to what people tell us about the services we inspect and regulate, and about the way we work.

Valuing people's differences

We promote equal opportunities and take action to help ensure that improvement is made where it is most needed.

What we do

Inspection

We publish what inspectors look for during inspections so those providing services know what is expected of good and outstanding care, education and training, and can use our frameworks to drive their own improvement.

Our specialist inspectors are experts in the type of service they inspect. When they carry out an inspection, be it of a children's home, a nursery, a school, a college, or a local authority, they focus on the quality of the service for individual children, young people or older learners. During an inspection, inspectors collect first-hand evidence based on the practice they observe and what they learn from the people using the service. They use this evidence and other information available to make their professional judgements.

We share our inspection findings in published inspection reports. Parents, learners and employers use and trust this information to help them make choices about the services they use. Those responsible for services, including local and national government, also use the information to hold service providers to account. Our inspection reports contain clear recommendations so those providing services know what they need to do to improve. We inspect weaker services more frequently to help ensure that they improve quickly.

We inspect the following services: maintained schools and academies; some independent schools; early years and childcare; children's centres; children's homes; family centres; adoption and fostering services and agencies; Cafcass; children's services in local authorities; initial teacher training; further education colleges and 14 to 19 provision; a wide range of work-based learning and skills training; adult and community learning; probation services; and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments.

Regulation

For a range of early years and children's social care services, we also act as a regulator, checking that people, premises and the services provided are suitable to care for children and potentially vulnerable young people. Where those wanting to provide childcare or children's social care do not meet the required standards, we do not license them to operate.

We check that the childcare and children's social care services we regulate are meeting the required standards, looking into concerns when raised. If we find they are not, we use our enforcement powers to make sure that they make the necessary improvements. If they are unable to meet the required standards, we act in the interests of the children and/or young people in their care and suspend or cancel their licence to operate.

In-depth surveys and good practice studies

We also investigate and report on the quality of provision in National Curriculum subjects and aspects of social care, childcare, education, and learning and skills. In these surveys we use our rights of access, and our ability to make expert judgements on the effectiveness of services, to provide unique evidence to local and national policymakers. We share what we find, so those organisations that provide services can learn from what is working well and what is not. And we highlight good practice by publishing reports and individual case studies, drawing on the full range of evidence available.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is statutorily responsible for Ofsted's inspection and regulatory work. She is able to draw on the full range of our inspection findings to report on the quality of education, children's services and skills, locally and nationally. She is responsible to Parliament for the organisation, staffing and management of Ofsted, and for ensuring the efficient and effective use of our resources.

The Children's Rights Director

The Children's Rights Director, based in Ofsted, gives support to the rights of looked after children and young people. Taking into account the views of these children and young people, the Children's Rights Director provides advice that helps make sure our inspection and regulation protects and promotes their life chances.

Our priorities

All of Ofsted's work is designed to improve outcomes for children and learners, and to support our vision of raising standards and improving lives while providing value for money

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires us to carry out our work in ways which encourage the services we inspect and regulate to:

- improve
- be user-focused
- be efficient and effective.

We think it is right that Ofsted should have the same commitment to improve, to focus on the users of services, and to work efficiently and effectively.

Our first priority is to achieve **better outcomes** and we will work to make this a reality through:

- better inspection and regulation
- better public involvement
- better ways of working.

Better outcomes Driving improvement for children and learners of all ages		
Better inspection and regulation Improving the way we work in order to provide sharper accountability that focuses on underperformance and drives fairness for those using services	Better public involvement Ensuring that people's views and experiences inform how and when we inspect and regulate; and empowering people with the information they need to hold services to account	Better ways of working Using our resources responsibly in effective, efficient and sustainable ways that focus on the front line

The following sections describe each priority in more detail. First, the plan sets out the outcomes for children and learners against which we will track our impact. Those organisations that provide services can make the most direct difference to these outcomes, and Ofsted is not the only organisation promoting their improvement. But since this is Ofsted's primary purpose, we believe it is right that our performance should be considered in part in this way.

The plan then describes each of the priorities designed to support improved outcomes, setting out what we will do, our key milestones and the indicators against which we will track our progress. We will refresh this strategic plan in line with our Departmental Business Plan on an annual basis to help ensure we are focusing our work in the right areas.

Better outcomes

Children and learners in England need the very best education, training and care to succeed in increasingly challenging circumstances. Life chances are much improved, but the difference in outcomes between disadvantaged children and their peers is not reducing quickly enough. Levels of attainment are rising, but not to the same extent for different groups of children, and not as much overall as in some other countries.

Ofsted will work to raise standards in all the services it inspects and regulates. It will drive improvement by:

- publishing inspection frameworks that are clear about what good and outstanding services look like, and what is not good enough
- using specialist inspectors who can focus sharply on the issues that really matter
- involving those that provide services in inspections
- identifying in inspection reports what needs to improve and making clear recommendations for action
- publishing in-depth surveys that focus on priority issues and subjects
- sharing good practice, helping others to learn from what is working well.

Ofsted will work to improve the lives of children and learners of all ages and will report its progress against the outcomes they achieve, including:

- how well children across England do at school, including:
 - readiness for school
 - reading at age 6
 - attainment at age 11
 - attainment at age 16
 - attainment at age 19
- how well children from different backgrounds do at school in comparison with their peers, including:
 - looked after children
 - children from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - children with special educational needs
- what children and young people do on leaving school
- what young people and adults do on leaving further education

- how well children and young people are being protected from harm (informed by the recommendations arising out of the Munro review of child protection).

Better inspection and regulation

We will provide sharper, more focused inspection and regulation that targets underperformance and ensures those using services can hold them to account.

What we know

- The best services take account of what Ofsted looks for to drive their own improvement. They value inspection as external challenge that helps to sustain and improve their performance. Good and outstanding providers of care, education and skills want to share what they are doing so others can learn from it.
- Inspection and regulation are valued when they are carried out by skilled and experienced inspectors who provide clear recommendations to services about how they can improve.
- Weaker services benefit from more frequent inspection. Inspectors can help identify what they need to do to improve and check they are taking the required steps.
- Inspection is a powerful lever for improvement, and effective regulation ensures that only appropriate individuals deliver services in childcare and education. But inspection and regulation also provide an opportunity to identify and celebrate success and good practice, and reaffirm what a provider is doing right.
- Involving school and college leadership teams more during the inspection process has been successful and we can learn from this in other areas of our work.
- Those providing services highly prize the 'outstanding' rating and use our brand with pride to promote their provision.
- We need to be proportionate in our approach, adjusting the scale of inspection and regulation according to the outcomes of previous inspection reports and risk assessments. This will allow us to deploy resources where improvement is most needed or where inspection can add most value.

What we will do

We will:

- focus inspection and regulation where it can have the greatest positive impact on the quality of service provided and the life chances of children and learners
- focus regulation on ensuring that only those suitable are able to register to care for children and young people

- focus inspection more on weaker services, including those failing to move from 'satisfactory' to 'good'
- directly observe practice during inspections to understand and get underneath the experience and outcomes for children and learners
- make more use of the information available to us, including from those using services, in order to determine whether inspection is necessary
- communicate more effectively with those we inspect and regulate, making sure we leave them with clear recommendations designed to have the maximum impact on improvement
- report impartially on how government policy affects the quality of education, care and skills, and on areas of concern and high public interest, helping the government to develop effective policy and use resources more effectively
- analyse and share our findings with those using services, those providing them, local and national government, and others, writing clearly and appropriately for all audiences
- introduce new ways to identify and disseminate current and best practice within and across the sectors we inspect and regulate, highlighting and celebrating their success
- reduce the indirect costs of inspection and regulation to those we inspect and regulate through:
 - better use of information already held by Ofsted and other inspectorates and regulators
 - more risk-based, proportionate inspection
 - greater coordination when we inspect those providing more than one type of service, across Ofsted and with other inspectorates and regulators
 - little or no notice periods where practicable and more clearly defined expectations to minimise uncertainty and the time taken to prepare for inspection.
- respond to requests for inspections, and where appropriate charge providers for inspections requested outside routine inspection programmes
- regularly evaluate the way we inspect and regulate, learn from and share best practice domestically and internationally, and review our impact to ensure continuous improvement.

Key milestones and indicators

We will report our progress against these milestones:

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1.1 | Implement reforms to the inspection and regulation of childcare and early years | By September 2012 |
| 1.2 | Implement reforms to the inspection of schools | By January 2012 |
| 1.3 | Implement reforms to the inspection and regulation of children's social care | By April 2013 |
| 1.4 | Implement reforms to the inspection and assessment of children's services in local authorities | By May 2012 |
| 1.5 | Implement reforms to the inspection of learning and skills | By September 2012 |
| 1.6 | Reduce the indirect cost of inspection and regulation to those we inspect and regulate | By April 2013 |

During 2011–15, we will track and report on:

- the standards achieved by those we inspect and regulate
- what those we inspect and regulate tell us about our work.

Better public involvement

We will ensure people's views and experiences inform how and when we inspect and regulate, and empower people with the information they need to hold services to account.

What we know

- Involving those who use the services we inspect and regulate – children and learners, parents, carers and employers – in deciding when and how to act is important. Only by engaging with them effectively between, before, during, and after inspections can we make sure that we learn from their views and experiences.
- Inspection and regulation generate a unique and powerful pool of information and intelligence. Those providing the services we inspect and regulate, and those with an interest in care, education and training, want better access to this information in an easy to use form.
- It is important that we work with those providing services when developing the way we inspect and regulate.
- We have improved the way we conduct and report on formal consultations but can learn more from informal feedback and complaints to ensure continuous improvement.
- Inspection reports help parents and carers, adult learners, employers and local authorities to choose services, but while we have made improvements, they are still sometimes written in language which is hard to understand.
- Ofsted's website is one of the most visited of any public sector information service. But we know that it needs to be better, and that in particular we need to make it more accessible and interactive, to ensure it continues to be a useful resource.
- We already use complaints information about providers when assessing whether to inspect and are now investigating how we can better use technology to collect more regular feedback from those who use the services we inspect and regulate.

What we will do

We will:

- increase opportunities for those using the services we inspect and regulate to let us know about their experiences and what matters to them, including new opportunities arising from developments in digital media
- seek the views of all those we inspect and regulate following inspections to understand their experience and improve the way we work
- make sure our reports and letters are clear, concise and published as quickly as possible
- make the information we hold about the quality of the services we inspect and regulate more accessible, so that it can be analysed and learnt from
- communicate effectively about how we inspect and regulate so those that provide services are clear about how we work, and any inspection myths or misunderstandings are quickly resolved
- work with the media to make sure how we work and what we find in our inspections are reported accurately and to relevant audiences
- make better use of online technology when making information available and engaging with people about our work, making our website easier to use and more interactive
- act swiftly and in accordance with legislation when a member of the public makes a formal complaint about a school or a service that we regulate, or raises a safeguarding issue affecting children and vulnerable people.

Key milestones and indicators

We will report our progress against the following milestones from our Departmental Business Plan:

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------|
| 2.1 | Further enable those using services to feed back on their quality between inspections | By September 2012 |
| 2.2 | Increase the involvement of those using services during inspections | By September 2012 |
| 2.3 | Make information about the quality of services more available, accessible and transparent | By April 2012 |

During 2011–15, we will track and report on:

- what those that use the services we inspect and regulate tell us about our work
- the usage of different aspects of our improved website
- engagement through consultations on our work.

Better ways of working

We will use resources responsibly in an effective, efficient and sustainable way that focuses on the front line.

What we know

- We have already made significant reductions to the cost of inspection and regulation, with costs 30% less than they were in 2003–04.
- But, in line with other government departments, we are required to make additional savings amounting to a further 30% reduction in real terms by 2014–15. This will include savings to administration costs of at least 33%, protecting where possible our front-line inspection services.
- Working with inspection service providers helps us to deliver more inspections, while reducing costs and improving efficiency.
- We have reduced the number of permanent employees working from our London office by 40% in the last three years and have plans to reduce this still further.
- We are a leading employer of home-based workers, with all our inspection workforce and increasing numbers of our support staff working from home, supported by effective information services.
- Increasingly, government is expecting departments to use shared services where these provide the best value for money.
- We need to introduce leaner processes which make better use of technology, and make the most of the skills and experience of Ofsted staff. Technology has already helped us to reduce travel costs and improve communication, especially for our home-based workforce.
- Effective management and development of our people are key, and Investors in People silver accreditation has helped focus and drive improvement in the way we work.
- Good internal communication helps to underpin efficient ways of working, and it is important to use the right form of communication at the right time.
- We are committed in all our work to promoting equal opportunities and valuing people's differences and have made real improvements in the way we work, in line with our published Single Equalities Scheme and using our Equalities Standard as a tool to gauge progress.
- Incorporating sustainable development activities into our work processes has resulted in savings and improved ways of working.

What we will do

We will:

- seek to attract and retain people who are the best in their field, with the right experience, skills and competencies from a range of diverse backgrounds
- ensure staff have up-to-date knowledge and information through highly effective training programmes and internal communication
- use secondees from the sectors we inspect and regulate as an important part of our inspection workforce, ensuring that the organisation benefits from their recent experience
- introduce more streamlined processes and make better use of technology, seeking innovative ways to provide high-quality services in more challenging economic conditions
- look across government to find greater efficiencies in the way we work, including sharing resources and services where appropriate
- continue to improve our information services, making the best use of the information we hold and using new technologies in efficient and effective ways to support our work
- make sure our business support functions are efficient and effective, provide good value for money, and compare well against relevant benchmarks
- monitor our performance against high standards for sustainable development
- continue to devote proportionately more resources to front-line inspection and regulation
- ensure that equality and diversity is at the heart of our work and organisation and is reflected in our people at all levels
- use achieving gold Investors in People accreditation in 2012 as a framework for continuing to improve the way we manage and develop our people
- ensure that Ofsted's property strategy is beneficial to business need, helping to reduce the government property portfolio and achieve value for money through better ways of working.

Key milestones and indicators

We will report our progress against the following milestones:

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 3.1 | Streamline corporate support functions, reducing costs in the process | By April 2013 |
| 3.2 | Reduce our overall costs by £25m, and be on target to reduce them by £42m by 2014–15 | By April 2013 |

During 2011–15, we will track and report on:

- our costs
- human resources information, including information from staff surveys
- our achievement against the Equality Standard
- our achievement against the Investors in People standard.

Who we are and our resources

Our Board

The Ofsted Board determines the strategic priorities and targets for Ofsted, and ensures that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's functions are performed efficiently and effectively. Individually and collectively, the Board members have a wealth of experience across a wide range of sectors:

- **Baroness Sally Morgan**, Chairman
- **Christine Gilbert CBE**, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
- **John Roberts CBE**, senior non-executive
- **Dame Jane Roberts**, non-executive
- **Vijay Sodiwala**, non-executive
- **Sir Alan Steer**, coopted non-executive
- **Museji Takolia CBE**, non-executive
- **Christopher Trinick**, non-executive and Chairman of the Audit Committee.

Our Executive Board

Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, is the Accounting Officer for Ofsted and leads the Executive Board, which includes the following executive directors:

- **Richard Brooks**, Director, Strategy
- **Matthew Coffey**, Director, Development and Strategy (Learning and Skills)
- **John Goldup**, National Director, Development and Strategy (Social Care)
- **Sue Gregory**, National Director, Inspection Delivery
- **Lorraine Langham**, Director, Organisational Development
- **Patrick Leeson**, Director, Development and Strategy (Education and Care)
- **Darryl Nunn**, Director, Finance and Resources.

Our people

Ofsted's inspection workforce is made up of both employed and contracted inspectors. Around 2,700 people are available as contracted inspectors through our inspection service providers, and we directly employ 1,470 staff across England. Ofsted has extensive experience of working with inspection service providers, having done so efficiently and effectively since it took on responsibility for school inspections in 1992.

Ofsted's approach to its people is based on developing skilled and motivated staff members who take pride in their work, find new ways of working and take responsibility for their actions. We recruit, train and promote them, according to their ability to fulfil the requirements of the post. We are committed to the learning and development of all our staff in order to improve our performance and so make more of a difference for the children and learners on whose behalf we work.

Inspectors are home-based and the inspectors we employ receive administrative support from our offices in Bristol, Nottingham and Manchester. We also have an office in London in a building shared with another government department. We are proud of our position as one of the leading employers of home-based staff in the public sector and of the high-quality information services on which they depend.

What we spend

We will take action to achieve better value for money over the next four years in line with the requirements of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. We will make reductions in our expenditure from £185 million in 2010–11 to £143 million by 2014–15. The budget will be reduced gradually over a four-year period:

2010–11 baseline	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
£185m	£176m	£167m	£160m	£143m

While some savings will come from greater efficiencies in the way we work, we will also need to make adjustments to our inspection and regulatory programme to be able to operate effectively with the resources that will be available.